



## ***How to Conduct an Enhanced Zenith City Tabletop Exercise***

## ***Before Conducting an Exercise...***



Tabletops evaluate a group's capability to execute portions of emergency response, operations, and contingency plans

*Before running an exercise, provide training on:*

- Response Protocol Toolbox
- ER plans, procedures and protocols
- ICS, NIMS, Chain of Command

*Training can be in the form of orientation seminars or workshops*

### **Instructor Notes:**

Generally, tabletop exercises are conducted to evaluate one or several organizations' capabilities to execute portions of their emergency response, operations, and contingency plans. Many successful responses to emergencies have demonstrated the value of conducting exercises.

Before administering an enhanced tabletop exercise, the instructor should provide all participants with the necessary emergency response training, such as workshops or orientation seminars that deal with the Response Protocol Toolbox, and specific emergency response plans, protocols and procedures. The exercises provide the opportunity to apply the procedures outlined in an organization's ER plan.

## ***Emphasize Exercise Goals***



The main goal of the Zenith City Enhanced Tabletop Exercises:  
*To “test-drive” a water utility’s ERP*

*This includes:*

- Testing ER & RPTB protocols and procedures
- Reinforcing ER communications
- Establishing chain of command (Who’s in charge?)

### **Instructor Notes:**

You should be sure to emphasize the exercise goal(s) to the participants, so that they keep them in mind while working through the exercise.

The main goal of the Zenith City enhanced tabletop exercises is to “test-drive” a water utility’s emergency response plan (ERP). By exercising the plan, exercise participants are asked to demonstrate their ability to:

- apply emergency response protocols and procedures from the ERP and the Response Protocol Toolbox (RPTB);
- communicate effectively with their peers and members of other agencies that might be involved in an emergency situation, and
- establish and follow a chain of command that can effectively oversee the management of an emergency incident.

You may choose to alter the goal(s) of the exercise depending on the audience. In any case, keep the goal(s) in mind throughout the exercise, since they will guide the post-exercise evaluation, a.k.a. the “Hot Wash.”

## ***Tips for Running an Exercise***

*SOURCE: FEMA Guidance & Lessons Learned*

### *Tip Topics*

- Communications
- Controlling Time and Pace
- Dealing With Role Failure



### **Instructor Notes:**

Once the trainer has trained the participants and made sure that they understand the goals of the exercise, the trainer can proceed with running the enhanced Zenith City tabletop exercises.

The following slides present a list of items to consider when running the enhanced tabletop exercises provided on the Zenith City CD. These hints are derived from:

- FEMA Exercise Design Guidance;
- lessons learned while conducting similar water security exercises for both small and large groups; and
- the experience of others.

The instructor should add any hints or lessons learned from their own experiences derived from running or participating in exercises to enhance the value of this presentation for future instructors.

The tips in this presentation will cover how to handle communications between participants, how to manage the time and pace of the exercise, and how to deal with role failure if a certain group of participants leads the exercise astray with their actions or lack thereof.

## ***TIPS - Communications***

- Let communications and actions evolve naturally
- Let participants guide the direction of the response actions
- Allow participants to falter – address faults in the After Action Review



### **Instructor Notes:**

When running an enhanced tabletop exercise, it is critical to allow the communications between participants and the actions taken by the participants to evolve naturally. As much as possible, exercise controllers should avoid interfering with the progression of the communications and actions taken.

By minimizing interference with the exercise's progression, the participants are forced to guide the direction of the response actions themselves.

If a group is not communicating effectively, or not following the prescribed response protocols, controllers should allow them to falter, and they should make note of any mistakes made. Any faults should be addressed during the after-action review and used for "lessons learned."

## ***TIPS – Communications***

- Don't allow participants to act on overheard information
- Track communications and actions carefully
- Flag key communications and actions for future reference



### **Instructor Notes:**

Throughout an exercise, controllers should not allow participants to act on information they overhear from another table. Controllers should track communications closely to make sure that a group's actions or reactions are exclusively based on, or in response to, information they have received via a communication/action card from another group or via an inject, such as a press release.

Controllers track communications by simply reading all the carbon copies of the "Communication Cards" brought up to the control table by the participants. If a notable communication or action is taken, the controller should flag it for future discussion using a small Post-it Note® (or equivalent). Notable communications/actions are those that are integral to the success or failure of the emergency response and recovery processes being tested by a given threat scenario.



## ***TIPS – Controlling Time and Pace***

- Keep track of time and keep on schedule – follow the exercise timeline!
- Maintain pace by timing the injects

### **Instructor Notes:**

Each exercise on the Zenith City CD has an exercise timeline that has been created to guide the controllers throughout the administration of the exercise. The timeline specifies when to issue injects, when to present press releases, and when to change event days.

The timeline translates real time into event time for the controllers. This way the controller only needs to track real time (using a watch or clock), to track the simulated elapsed time of the exercise.

Following the timeline and adhering to the timing of injects, such as media alerts, is critical to maintaining the pace of the exercise. If an exercise is progressing too quickly or too slowly, timing the release of injects can help the controller re-establish the proper pace of the exercise.

## ***TIPS – Controlling Time and Pace***



If the exercise is progressing *too quickly*:

- Delay injects or information
- Introduce conflicting information or a “red herring” via an inject

### **Instructor Notes:**

If an exercise is progressing too quickly, the controllers may wish to delay issuing certain information, such as laboratory results or investigation reports, in order to slow the exercise to a more manageable pace.

They might also consider introducing new or conflicting information, such as a red herring press release, that leads one or more of the entities involved in the exercise astray, temporarily. This ruse is perfectly legitimate, because during an actual incident, responders will be forced to sift through leads and information, some of which will be unnecessary for resolving the situation.

The purpose of a delay or a ruse is not to hinder the evolution of the exercise, but to instigate inter-group communications and to slow the speed of the exercise so that the controllers can manage the exercise effectively.



## ***TIPS – Controlling Time and Pace***



If the exercise is progressing ***slowly*** or is ***stalled***:

- Jump-start the response actions using a planned or impromptu inject
- Do not interfere as a controller, but as a simulator in the exercise (i.e., Media or Lab)

### **Instructor Notes:**

If an exercise is stagnating or has truly stalled, the controllers may have to step in to jump-start the response action by “nudging” a table in the right direction, either by using an inject, such as a press release, or, if a table is truly floundering, a direct hint about what to do. If a direct hint is required, it is probably indicative that the participants at the table have not received the appropriate training in emergency response procedures, and probably need to attend an orientation seminar and/or participate in drills.

If a controller must interfere in order to “nudge” the exercise back on track, they should avoid interfering as the “Controller.” Rather, they should use a simulator role, such as the lab or the media, to communicate with the party or parties that need to be redirected.

For example, if a hospital neglects to inform the health department of the occurrence of a disease outbreak, the response process may never be initiated. A simple press release to the rest of the exercise participants informing them that many illnesses are being reported at the hospital and the public is becoming alarmed should trigger the health department and local officials to ask the hospital for more details.

## ***TIPS – Dealing with Role Failure***

Not all participants are equally prepared



*In the event of an exercise breakdown...*

- Identify the weak link (or links)
- Confirm that their actions (or lack thereof) have significantly hindered the exercise
- Interfere as a controller to set the exercise back on track

### **Instructor Notes:**

It is possible for an exercise to become so stalled or misguided that it risks losing its value. Such a breakdown is typically caused by a role failure.

In the event of such a breakdown, the controller must identify the failed role and confirm that that role's actions are causing the breakdown of the exercise.

At that point, the controller may need to actively interfere as the "Controller" (as opposed to a simulator) to take corrective action and reinitiate the progression of the exercise.

## ***Final Thoughts...***



- Provide proper training before an exercise and set exercise goals
- Use the CD to guide the exercise setup
- Track communications and actions carefully
- Allow the exercise to evolve naturally
- Interfere as little as possible
- If failure is inevitable, interfere to save the exercise

### **Instructor Notes:**

This slide lists some final thoughts to summarize this presentation. These are the key elements that trainers and controllers should take away from this presentation.